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Wyoming official apologizes for Pavillion 'greed' comments

By JEREMY FUGLEBERG Star-Tribune business editor | Posted: Thursday, June 7, 2012 1:00 pm

After his remarks were repudiated by Gov. Matt Mead, Wyoming's top oil and natural gas regulator apologized for saying Pavillion area residents' concerns about possible water pollution from gas drilling are motivated by greed.

"I really believe greed is driving a lot of this," Wyoming Oil and Gas Supervisor Tom Doll said at a Tuesday meeting of state regulators in Vancouver, British Columbia, according to the energy news publication EnergyWire. "I think they're just looking to be compensated."

On Wednesday, Mead spokesman Renny MacKay said Doll's comments at an Interstate Oil and Gas Commission Compact meeting "didn't reflect the view of this administration."

"Governor Mead has directed state agencies and their staffs to assure an open and transparent process to address the concerns of Pavillion-area residents," MacKay said. "The comments made by Mr. Doll are contrary to the governor's expectation."

Mead is in China attending the 2012 International Advanced Coal Technologies Conference.

Doll issued his apology a few hours later.

"I sincerely apologize for my inappropriate and inconsiderate remarks," Doll said in a written statement.

But Doll's apology wasn't enough for John Fenton, chairman of the Pavillion Area Concerned Citizens, who called on Mead to question the value of a supervisor who has "lost all objectivity."

"I think Governor Mead needs to consider, is this somebody he wants representing the Oil and Gas Commission as his administrator, as someone who says whatever he wants and he supports industry no matter what goes on?" Fenton said. "I think the state and the people of Wyoming damn sure need more than that."

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in December released a draft report that tentatively linked the oil and gas industry practice of hydraulic fracturing to contamination found in a monitoring well in the Pavillion area.

On Tuesday, Doll lambasted the EPA for the report, according to EnergyWire, accusing the agency of deciding fracking caused the contamination and working backward to justify that claim.

Doll and other Wyoming officials have determined contamination found by the EPA in a monitoring well

was caused by the agency's drilling of the well, he told the group of regulators.

"We believe the report is incomplete and bad science," he said, according to the online article.

Both state officials and the oil and gas industry had complained about the EPA's work and questioned its quality, even while residents and environmental groups hailed the agency's report as proof fracking can harm drinking water.

Some residents in the area had complained about foul smelling well water for years, first taking their complaints to state officials, whose tests found nothing, then to the federal agency.

"So they went to the EPA and said, 'We didn't hear what we wanted to hear,'" Doll said, according to the EnergyWire report.

Mead has since called for additional testing, which has now been completed by the EPA and the U.S. Geological Survey. On Wednesday, the governor's office said the state will wait for the results before it draws conclusions.

"Governor Mead is committed to ensuring that residents in the Pavillion area have clean drinking water," MacKay said. "It is premature to draw conclusions about the outcome of the current scientific investigation, which will be informed by sampling and analysis of the EPA's deep monitor wells. Governor Mead continues to say Wyoming will be led by the science."

In his apology, Doll said it was premature to judge the ongoing investigation.

"The state and citizens of the state demand that I am objective in this investigation and any other investigations of impacts to the public health and safety," he said.

That wasn't enough for Jeff Locker, another Pavillion area resident with concerns about his water.

"We've lived with this problem for a long time and it's not driven by greed, it's driven by health issues," he said. "If Mr. Doll believes it's driven by greed, let him come out here and see how the hell he likes it."

Read more: http://trib.com/news/state-and-regional/wyoming-official-apologizes-for-pavillion-greed-comments/article_3eb8976e-2eea-50db-a80f-4d5758deba43.html#ixzz1x8lV7hd2

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